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SUBJECT: READ-OUT FROM NEW FADILLAH PARTY LEADERSHIP IN BASRAH

REF: BASRAH 98

CLASSIFIED BY: Mark Marrano, DEPUTY REGIONAL COORDINATOR, REO  
BASRAH, DEPARTMENT OF STATE.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On June 6, the Deputy Regional Coordinator (DRC) met with the new head of the Basrah Fadillah Party, Dr. Jamal Abdul Zahra Mezel, at the Fadillah Party headquarters. Dr. Jamal stated that the Fadillah Party in Basrah believed that the media was blowing the security issue out of proportion, and that what was really needed was an increase in central government funding for infrastructure projects in the city. He confirmed that the Iraqi Army was accorded only a minor role in the emergency security plan, and that Iraqi police were given primary responsibility for carrying out the plan. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On June 6, the DRC met with the new head of the Basrah Fadillah Party, Dr. Jamal Abdul Zahra Mezel, at the Fadillah Party headquarters. The Fadillah Party changed leadership on May 22 on the direction of the Fadillah spiritual leader in Najaf, Sheikh Yacoubi. Dr. Jamal downplayed the change in leadership, saying that this was the second such change in the past three years. The DRC stressed the need to maintain open communications despite changes in party leadership and staff rotation, and Dr. Jamal wholeheartedly agreed.

¶3. (C) Dr. Jamal delivered the Fadillah Party's message that the media was exaggerating the security situation in Basrah, and that the real needs in Basrah were for central government financing for electricity, water, and education projects. He said that the provincial government had received only one payment of two billion Iraqi dinars so far from the current government, and nothing from the British. The former local government, he complained, got much more. He said that the May 26 media stories regarding the Fadillah Party's threats to cut off oil supplies in retaliation for losing the Ministry of Oil were lies, and that his party had filed court cases against Fox News, Al Sharqiya, and Al Diar news for libel. He speculated that the rumor had been spread by Fadillah's political competition. (Comment: This could be almost any other political party in Basrah, as most of them were engaged in trying to get Governor Mohammed Wa'hili of the Fadillah Party removed from office over the past two months. End Comment.)

¶4. (C) Dr. Jamal also downplayed the rocket attack on the Fadillah Party headquarters that caused structural damage to the windows but no injuries on May 23, saying that the attack was not serious, and that he did not know or care who had conducted the attack. He had no theories about who might have conducted the marketplace bombing on June 3 or the attack on the Sunni mosque on June 4. The Prime Minister's visit to Basrah on May 31 was a good thing, he said, because the high-level visit was a sign of respect. He confirmed information received from

Governor Mohammed Wa'hili (see reftel) on June 5 that the Iraqi Army did not have a large role in implementing the emergency security plan, and that the Iraqi Police would be in charge of carrying out most of the plan. He said he had not yet been approached by the British Consulate in Basrah.

¶5. (C) Comment: The meeting at the Fadillah Party headquarters in Basrah was a surreal experience- the female poloff was required to wear a head scarf, and everyone was required to take off their shoes when entering the building. Garlanded portraits of Sheikh Yacoubi decorated the wall. In contrast to meetings with the previous Fadillah leader, Dr. Hayder al-Wa'eli, various unidentified party members, some in camouflage uniform and suspected to be militia members, also sat in on the June 6 meeting. A man with a video camera taped the entire exchange, roaming the room to get different camera angles. Nevertheless, Dr. Jamal was polite, educated, and well spoken, and welcomed the attention that he received from the visit.

¶6. (C) Comment continued: Dr. Jamal was close-mouthed about the reasons for the shake-up of Fadillah party leadership, which was the talk of the town before the Prime Minister's visit on May ¶31. Whatever the reasons for the changes, the Fadillah Party and Governor Mohammed Wa'hili are closely in line with each other. Both are maintaining an open and welcoming stance with coalition forces but refraining from any real engagement on the issue of security in the city. End comment.

MARRANO